

## *Obituary*

### **A Tribute To the Late Dr. Richard J. Blankenau, DDS by his Friend and Colleague, G. Lynn Powell, DDS<sup>†</sup>**

While never losing his zeal for scientific research and his wonderful optimistic attitude, my good friend and fellow colleague, Dr. Richard J. Blankenau, lost his battle with abdominal cancer on June 14, 1999. Some of his last words to me were, "Do you have the manuscript done on the clinical pilot study for (laser) decay prevention? Please send it to me so I can see it".

Dick was first introduced to lasers in 1988 when I invited him to participate in a new study to explore the use of the argon laser to initiate rapid polymerization of dental composites. That project was soon followed by others leading to the adoption of lasers and other light devices for curing of composites in 10 seconds or less. We explored many other projects together including, but not limited to, laser initiated polymerization, oral soft tissue surgery, root canal therapy, dental decay prevention, bleaching, safety of the pulp, cavity preparation and pain reduction of aphthous ulcers. Some of these led to FDA clearances for several manufacturers and I am confident other clearances will come in the future. His background in operative dentistry and his conservative approach to general dentistry was intertwined with his enthusiastic love for lasers and the potential good they held for patients in dentistry.

Championing lasers before they were accepted by the dental community, Dick traveled, frequently at his own expense, to national and international meetings where he could present research or clinical cases. He pioneered early clinical placement of composites, sealants and bases with lasers; surgical applications for the argon; and most recently, the first clinical pilot study for decay prevention. His early experimental patients were not unknown to him but consisted of personal patients and family members.

Dr. Blankenau graduated from Creighton School of Dentistry in 1966, served as a dentist in the US Public Health Service for two years and returned to Creighton to begin teaching full time in 1968 until the time of his death. While teaching he maintained a part-time practice and served on numerous committees. He held many administrative positions including Chairman of Operative Dentistry, Associate Dean for Academic Affairs, University PRT committee, First Endowed Chair in Dentistry, and at the time of his death was Treasurer of the International Society for Lasers in Dentistry.

He is survived by his wife of 36 years, Laurine, and four children: Paul, Boulder, Colorado; Renee (Michael Rock) Blankenau, Washington DC; Mark, Dearborn, Michigan; Andrea (Greg) Jahn, Omaha, Nebraska, and two grandchildren. Dick loved his wife and family. He was proud of each of his children's educational and personal accomplishments. He was there to encourage and help in whatever they were doing.

Although I was about his same age, Dick always called me "kid" and as a Creighton colleague wrote, "He did what was just best". As with his own family and in his personal life, Dick encouraged others to do the best they possibly could. But he didn't leave it at that—he helped them do it. I will miss my friend and colleague. For me, laser research will never be the same without Dick. His contributions will be felt for years to come.

<sup>†</sup>This tribute is reprinted from the *Journal of Clinical Laser Medicine and Surgery* 1999; 17(4), with permission from Mary Ann Liebert Publishers.